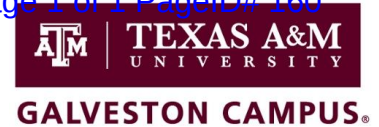


TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY AT GALVESTON

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, VICE PRESIDENT AND SUPERINTENDENT



Col. Michael E. Fossum '80, USAFR (Ret.)
Chief Operating Officer (TAMUG) | Vice President, (TAMU)
Superintendent, Texas A&M Maritime Academy

January 21, 2023

I am writing this letter to address the character of one of my former students, George Pickard.

After retiring as a NASA Astronaut and Colonel in the USAF Reserves, I currently serve as a Vice President of Texas A&M University, Chief Operating Office of the Galveston Campus, and Superintendent of the Texas A&M Maritime Academy.

I personally know George Pickard as a remarkable student and incredible young man. He came to the Texas A&M Maritime Academy in August 2015 at the age of 15 after graduating very early from high school and completing 2 sessions in community college. We had never had a student so young and had to coordinate with the US Coast Guard to ensure it was legal for him to be in our Third Mate licensing program. There were some concerns about how he would do as a student with older, more traditional college students, but those concerns were immediately put to rest when we met George in person. He presented himself as very mature, keenly intelligent, and internally driven to succeed. To help George fit in with the other students, we didn't publicize his age and allowed him live life as a regular student and normal cadet in training.

George was a model student, had excellent grades, and did great as a member of our residential, uniformed cadet corps. The real test was how he did during his annual summer training at sea, and this was where George really excelled. I took personal pride in sharing part of his summer training on the ship where I could watch him master his skills and help train the less experienced cadets. He was always confident, competent, and patient on the ship, as well as showing a joy for this career field and camaraderie with his fellow cadets and shipmates.

I believe it was during his final sea term in the summer of 2018 when everybody, including the ship crew, finally learned he was only 18 years old. I think everyone on the ship was shocked and gave him some ribbing, but George took it all in stride because he had already proven himself. It was my great honor to present him with his university diploma and US Coast Guard Third Mate's license after we got back to campus.

George has the record of being the youngest graduate in our maritime academy's history and one of the few in the United States to earn their Third Mate credentials at this age since World War II. This news article tells part of George's remarkable story: https://www.pilotonline.com/news/article_024dc594-c588-11e8-a0f2-ebf77381d1e7.html

Throughout my career in the Air Force, NASA, and now Texas A&M University, I have had the privilege and honor to work with many of our nation's best. I will always count George Pickard among them. If you have any questions, please contact me at fossum@tamug.edu or 409-740-4408.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael E. Fossum". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Col. Michael E. Fossum, USAFR (Ret.)
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